

Dear Representative Luxenberg, Senator Moore, and members of the Housing Committee:

I am writing to express my strong support for, which aims to address the pressing issue of affordable housing in our state and provide good cause eviction protections, measures that would require landlords to have actual reasons to ask tenants to leave..

I am the Executive Director of the Franciscan Center for Urban Ministry (FCUM), and we are members of GHIAA. In our downtown Hartford ministry, I have witnessed firsthand the challenges that many renters face in finding and keeping affordable and stable housing. At the FCUM, one way we serve the poor and marginalized is by serving dinner 365 days a year. Our numbers served skyrocketed during the early days of the pandemic when many other providers closed down, but as they returned to service, our numbers dropped to roughly 35-40 people a night.

But that changed starting in April, 2022, when we steadily saw our numbers climb. Until by the fall, our numbers had more than doubled and our cost had risen 80%. Many of these newer folks were not unhoused, but were being squeezed by increases in rent, gas, food, utilities and while they may have had an increase in pay, it fell short of what was needed. This proposed rent stabilization program would help to address this problem by limiting annual rent increases for certain rental properties., while still allowing landlords to earn a return. This approach has been successfully implemented in other states and cities, and helps protect tenants from arbitrary rent hikes and displacement.

Rising housing costs have created a significant burden for many low- and middle-income families in Connecticut. In many cases, renters are forced to spend much of their income on rent, leaving little left over for other necessities like food, healthcare, and education. This not only harms individual renters and their families but also has broader economic and social consequences for our communities.

I want to tell you one story about one of our “guests” at the FCUM. Victor is 70 years old, despite reaching the age when many are retired, he continues to work in a local factory. We don’t see Victor for meals as much as many others. He mostly comes toward the end of the month when things get tight financially. He has lived in the same apartment in a triple decker house on Franklin Ave in the Southend of Hartford for the past 16 years. Victor’s previous landlord would raise the rents reasonably, but not more than \$50. Two years ago there was a new owner, who Victor related, has also purchased several other buildings. The first year, the new

landlord raised his rent from \$800 a month to \$1000. a month. In 2023, the landlord again raised the rent, this time to \$1,400. This constitutes a 75% increase in rent. How many of us could handle that burden? How many of us would find ourselves on the street if our cost of housing was increased like this? Victor stopped me outside the Center to ask me if there was something I could do about this. And so I offer his story as part of my testimony about why justice calls us to protect folks like Victor, to protect affordable housing in our state.

The vulnerability of Victor is not unique. Approximately 34% of all Connecticut residents rent their homes, including 27.5% of seniors like Victor, many on fixed incomes, many with no financial resources to manage such unreasonable increases. But is this state? I had to tell Victor this is what our government allows such increases.

While Victor's case is egregious, he is not alone in having to face the challenge of a significant rent increase. In the last two years, the average Connecticut rent increase was 20%. Skyrocketing rent is driving homelessness and increasing evictions. A \$100. increase in rent translates to a 9% increase in homelessness. In 2022, Hartford's homelessness jumped 13% after years of decline.

I also am a Franciscan priest and my Catholic faith reminds me that our scriptures remind us repeatedly to take care of the poor and marginalized. My religious tradition calls me to speak out against injustice and if a 75% rent increase on a 70-year-old isn't injustice, frankly, I don't know what is.

Most of us admit we have a problem with lack of affordable housing in this state. In a survey (1) conducted last month 78 percent of registered voters consider our state "unaffordable." That same survey showed strong support for action on this issue and the following is what our people want their legislators to do - now. 86 percent say it is "very important" or "somewhat important" that Connecticut work to make housing more affordable. About 91 percent say it's important to prevent existing residents from being priced out of their homes. 72% of registered voters say they support capping rent increases at 2.5 percent. 1

There will be opposition to this bill by powerful lobbyist, peddling outdated myths about rent caps. Well documented research conducted by the Coalition for Nonprofit Housing and Economic Development (CNHED) shows clearly that the dangers opponents traditionally raise to rent controls are false.

- Rent control has no impact on housing construction. Conversions from rental housing to condominiums and other owner-occupied housing do occur but can be mitigated by closing regulatory loopholes and strengthening ordinances regulating conversions.
- Rent control does not lead to poor housing quality.
- Rent control provides a large stock of rental housing that is affordable for low- and moderate-income tenants and other communities vulnerable to displacement.
- The “trickle-down” or “filtering” theory that building more market-rate housing as the primary mechanism for providing affordable housing will neither ease the rent-burden of low- and moderate-income tenants, nor will it relieve the displacement pressures and housing instability that rent control is designed to alleviate.

Perhaps the biggest myth of all is that the current housing crisis has a singular solution. To solve the housing crisis, we must deploy every possible tool to ensure that housing is affordable. Rent control is unrivaled in its speed of implementation, scale, and cost-effectiveness

Not only would the passage of this bill protect tenants, but also provide benefit to landlords and the broader community. By ensuring that rental properties remain affordable and stable, while still allowing for inflation and a decent return on investment, we can help to reduce the number of evictions and homelessness in our state, while also supporting economic growth and stability of neighborhoods. We talk about the need for more affordable housing in our state. Not losing the current stock we have to unreasonable rent increases is a key piece of this.

I urge you to support SB 4 *An Act Concerning Connecticut's Present and Future Housing Needs* and take action to address the urgent issue of affordable housing in our state. By doing so, we can ensure that all Connecticut residents have access to safe, stable, and affordable housing and that folks like Victor do not end up homeless.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Fr. Michael Johnson OFM

Exec. Director

Franciscan Center for Urban Ministry

<sup>1</sup>This housing survey was sponsored by a collective called Growing Together Connecticut and administered by the polling firm Embold Research, which reached 2,562 registered voters in Connecticut online Jan. 23-30, 2023. Its margin of error was 2.1 percent, according to the firm.